

Journey 4-H Youth Mentoring

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Program of Distinction Category

Caring Relationships, Community Spirit
Healthy Relationships, Good Decisions
Youth Decision-Making
Volunteer Development

Sources of funding that support this program

The majority of funding for this program comes from Ottawa County, Michigan in the form of salary, benefits, office space, technology and support staff for one 4-H Extension Educator and two Program Assistants. The program currently utilizes the support of one AmeriCorps national service member and matching funds for this position are provided by the county as well. Local community foundations, private donations and local fundraising initiatives leverage funds for additional program activities and mentor support.

Program Content

Knowledge and Research Base

Each year, law enforcement agencies detain more than 2 million juveniles. Approximately 25% are released without charges or referred to another law enforcement or welfare agency (Snyder, 1999). The remaining 75%, except for those referred to the adult legal system, go to juvenile court and eventually return to their communities and the environments that led them to involvement with the legal system originally. To truly give young people growing up in high-risk environments a chance to succeed, society needs to find ways to support, intervene with and redirect youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system or have the potential for involvement in behaviors that will bring them in contact with law enforcement. Young people involved in the juvenile justice system often lack healthy relationships with adults, are typically disengaged from school and tend not to participate in constructive social activities which are necessary components to making a successful transition to adulthood and ultimately the workforce (Bauldry, 2004). Research shows that mentoring can improve young people's academic achievement and their school attendance (Campbell-Whatley, 2001; Grossman, 1999; Hancock, 2003; Herrera, Sipe & McClanahan, 2000; Jekielek, Moore, & Hair, 2002; Johnson, 1999; King, Vidourek, Davis & McClellan, 2002; Moon & Callahan,

2001; Redd, Cochran, Hair & Moore, 2002), even when education is not the primary focus of the mentoring program (Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001).

Planned mentoring provides organizations with opportunities to address the individual needs of youth. Every youth cannot be treated the same. Each individual has different issues and challenges that will benefit from the input and guidance of a caring adult. Research shows that tailoring positive guidance as an adaptive intervention for each youth can lead to the prevention of conduct disorders in high-risk youth (Collins, Murphy, & Bierman, 2004). Mentoring has been shown to improve relationships with family members (Herrera et al., 2000), elders and peers (Hancock, 2003; Jekielek et al., 2002). Research has also demonstrated that mentoring results in significantly higher school connectedness (Jekielek et al., 2002; King et al., 2002) and can help young people engage in less high-risk behaviors (Beier, Rosenfeld, Spitalny, Zansky, & Bontempo, 2000; Grossman, 1999; Hancock, 2003; Herrera et al., 2000; Jekielek et al., 2002; Keating, Tomishima, Foster, & Alessandri, 2002; King et al., 2002; Moore & Zaff, 2002). Additionally, mentoring has also been shown to increase the mentee's social skills (Moon & Callahan, 2001; Moore & Zaff, 2002).

Needs Assessment

In 1992, Ottawa County Family Court/Juvenile Services was looking for programming options for court involved youth. Mentoring programs in the community would not accept youth that had been involved in court due to the increased volunteer training and support involved in working with this population. The court approached Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) to develop a 4-H mentoring program. The court recognized 4-H's history of quality youth programming through the use of screened, trained and supported volunteers. MSUE received a 3-year grant from the county to pilot the program.

The program initially focused on chronic offenders and the program delivery method was small group, community based mentoring. A second needs assessment was completed after three years when the initial funding ended. Evaluation of recidivism rates and interviews with court staff and participants indicated that there was a need for a continuation of mentoring services with some changes. The group mentoring model posed some challenges while working with chronic offenders. This model introduced youth to others that were often negative influences. There were also scheduling difficulties between the mentors and multiple youth. Many of the chronic offenders had a variety of family, school and social problems that could not be addressed through mentoring alone. Experience and research indicated that the program might find more success in reducing the frequency and severity of delinquent behavior by focusing on youth that were newer to the juvenile justice system. The program was redesigned to serve youth that had fewer offenses through one-on-one mentoring. Journey 4-H Youth Mentoring has been a one-on-one, community based mentoring program since 1996. The program completes an annual needs assessment based on program evaluations and stakeholder input.

Program Goals and Objectives

Overall Program Goal: Journey 4-H Youth Mentoring aims to reduce the frequency and severity of delinquent behavior in youth participants ages 8-17 through one-on-one community based youth mentoring.

To reach this goal, mentors and mentees focus on developing a positive relationship. Mentors provide youth with a consistent, caring adult that they can turn to for support and assistance. Each match has different individual goals. Some youth need to improve anger management skills while others need assistance in problem solving and decision making. Many of these youth simply need to learn positive activities that will fill their free time. Each match works with their case manager (Extension staff member) to develop individual goals for their relationship.

Program Objective 1: Serve a minimum of 35 court-involved youth per year through community-based youth mentoring.

Program Objective 2: Reduce frequency and severity of youth participant delinquent behavior by a minimum of 65%.

Program Objective 3: Increase assets related to relationships, self perception and goals in a minimum of 65% of participants.

Target Audience

The target population for this program is court involved youth ages 8-17 in Ottawa County, Michigan. Ottawa County has many rural areas and small towns. Journey 4-H Youth Mentoring serves males and females from various backgrounds. Priority is given to youth currently on probation. Occasionally, the program will accept siblings of court involved youth or youth at high risk for court involvement when mentors are available. This is a voluntary program and youth must indicate that they would like to have a mentor and that they are willing to meet with the mentor for at least two hours a week for a year.

Type of Program

Other: 4-H Youth Mentoring Program

Delivery Methods

Journey 4-H Youth Mentoring matches screened, trained adults with youth that have been referred and oriented to the program. Participation by youth mentees in this program is completely voluntary. Prior to a match being made, the 4-H staff member works with the court staff, parent and youth to assess the youth's interests and personal goals for a mentoring relationship. Matches are made based on gender, similar interests, geographic proximity and youth goals.

Before any match is made, the volunteer mentor, youth, parent and court staff are informed of the potential mentor match opportunities and have the right to decline a proposed match if they are not comfortable with it. A match meeting is held where the 4-H staff member introduces the youth and parent to the potential mentor. This meeting often occurs at the youth's home to ensure that the youth is comfortable and because the mentor will need to pick the youth up from the home for future visits. A mentoring contract is signed by all parties agreeing to the terms of the match. The staff member facilitates a conversation regarding what can be expected in the future. The meeting ends with the mentor and mentee leaving the home for a brief visit to get to know each other.

Matches are expected to continue for a minimum of one year, with the mentor and mentee meeting weekly. The 4-H Journey Mentoring program does not

provide a pre-determined curriculum that is used during match meetings. Community based mentoring focuses on building a positive relationship and exploring mutually enjoyable activities. Each match is unique with regard to the activities they participate in. The activities are determined by the mentor and mentee and commonly include things such as participating in or watching sporting events, sharing a meal, volunteering, making a craft and attending program sponsored activities.

Mentors report to 4-H staff weekly regarding their visits. These reports are shared with the referring court staff member. Additionally, staff communicate with mentors, youth and parents by email, phone and in person on a regular basis to monitor the match. A match review and evaluation is conducted with each match every six months. Many matches stay together long beyond the one year requirement. Reviews and progress reports provide staff with the opportunity to learn what additional training needs exist and plan sessions to address these needs. Volunteer and youth recognition are an important component of the program and are built into the annual calendar of events.

Journey 4-H Youth Mentoring is the lead organization in the Ottawa County Mentoring Collaborative (OCMC) which is a partnership between 14 area mentoring organizations. The OCMC hosts four activities each month for mentoring matches. For example, this past June, matches had the opportunity to attend a picnic hosted by the Jaycees, attend an arena football game, participate in a photo road rally and go on a fishing trip sponsored by the local bass association. These activities provide matches with a free opportunity to learn a new skill, explore the community and meet other matches.

Curricula and Educational Materials

Effective mentors require a variety of skills. Mentors who are matched with youth involved in the court system need additional training and support in order to effectively respond to issues faced by the youth they mentor. To fulfill these needs, a mandatory 9-hour training curriculum has been designed by Journey 4-H Youth Mentoring staff to address these components. This curriculum draws on the resources of national mentoring organizations, but has been customized for use in this program. Prospective volunteers attend three 3-hour training sessions focused on preparing them to build a positive relationship with a youth. Training topics include relationship development, setting boundaries, communication, youth development, understanding the court and the mentoring cycle. Due to the effectiveness of our mentor training programs, Journey 4-H staff were asked to train mentors from other area mentoring programs beginning in 2002. Training sessions now include mentors from up to seven programs and are held monthly. Additional training sessions are designed based on mentor and mentee needs. These sessions may be conducted by 4-H staff, community partners or other professionals, depending on the topic.

Mentee orientation is conducted individually with youth participants through the intake process due to considerations regarding the population we serve and issues regarding transportation. Mentees are educated on effective mentoring relationships, their role and responsibilities in the match, communication strategies and what to expect from a mentoring match.

Teamwork and Collaboration

Ottawa County MSU Extension formed a partnership with Ottawa County Family Court/Juvenile Services to develop the Journey 4-H Youth Mentoring program. Journey 4-H is the only mentoring program that works exclusively with youth involved in the juvenile justice portion of the court. Staff from the court work with local 4-H staff to identify potential mentees and provide staff and mentors with information that will assist with current matches. 4-H staff members are included in bi-weekly court team meetings and meet quarterly with court staff to assess progress of the youth in the program.

Ottawa County MSU Extension founded and manages the Ottawa County Mentoring Collaborative to support mentors, mentored youth and mentoring programs. Our partners include Wrap Around, CASA, Higher Horizons, Greater Ottawa County United Way, Barnabas Ministries, Kids Hope USA, Zeeland Public Schools, Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Lakeshore, Bright Futures, STRIVE, HOSTS and LEDA Migrant Mentoring programs. These 14 programs work together to provide four activities each month for mentoring matches, produce a monthly newsletter for mentors, raise funds to support programming efforts, recruit volunteers and provide education and support to mentors and mentoring program staff.

Program Evaluation

Methods

Evaluation of the Journey 4-H Youth Mentoring includes the following:

- 1) An assessment of the reduction of the frequency and severity of delinquent behavior in program participants based on court records.
- 2) An assessment of asset development in the mentees based on biannual surveys of the youth participants.
- 3) An assessment of the number of youth served, number of mentors recruited and matched, average length of matches and demographic information regarding participants compared to program goals based on case management records and program files.
- 4) An assessment of youth, parent and volunteer satisfaction with the program based on biannual surveys and interviews with program participants.

Process Evaluation

Journey 4-H Youth Mentoring participates in the annual Mentor Michigan census. This allows us to examine our program efforts by comparing the number of youth served, volunteers recruited, mentors matched, average length of matches, average intensity of matches, etc. with mentoring programs statewide. The program staff also meets with mentors, youth and parents bi-annually to seek feedback regarding program satisfaction and suggested changes in operating structures.

Each year the program aims to reach a minimum of 35 youth through one-on-one mentoring services. In 2006, 38 youth were enrolled in the program. Twenty-two of these matches were new, while 16 matches continued their relationship that began in 2005 or earlier. An additional nine potential mentors went through part or all of the screening and training process but did not get

matched. Annually, 95% or more of youth, parents and mentors rate the program as excellent or good.

Outcome Evaluation

The two main sources for outcome data are:

- 1) A 2001 survey from The National Mentoring Partnership was completed by mentors and mentees to assess asset development every six months.
- 2) Data collected from the Ottawa County Family Court/ Juvenile Services and assessed by 4-H staff to determine if program participants have reduced the frequency and severity of delinquent behavior.

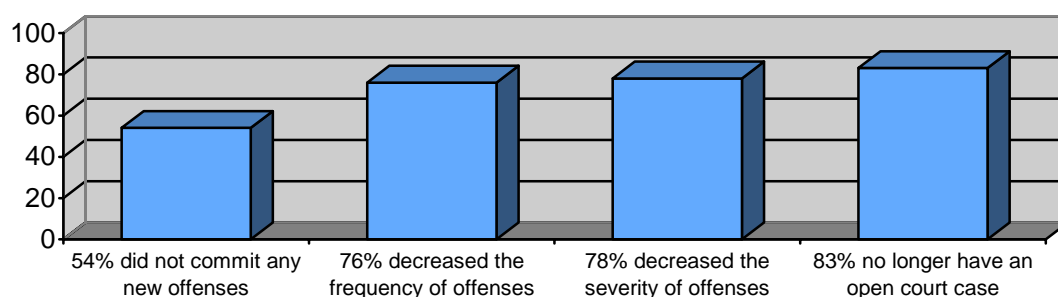
Mentors and mentees each complete an evaluation tool designed by the National Mentoring Partnership in collaboration with the Search Institute. This tool provides both formative and summative data. Youth participants answer questions regarding their perceived improvement in each of the 40 asset areas. Mentors are asked the same questions as their youth mentee. Highlights from the 2004/05 Journey 4-H Mentoring Program evaluation include the following:

As a result of having a relationship with a mentor:

- 87% of mentees feel like there are more adults who care about them.
- 87% of mentees feel like there are people who will help them out if they need it.
- 91% of mentees have higher expectations for themselves.
- 91% of mentees feel more confident.
- 91% of mentees think it's important to try and help others now.
- 87% of mentees feel they have more options for their future.
- 86% of mentees feel they have a more positive view of their future.
- 91% of mentees feel they are more honest.
- 86% of mentees feel they are better able to express their feeling now.
- 83% of mentees feel they are a better person now.

A review of mentee court records shows that mentored youth significantly reduce the frequency and severity of their delinquent behavior, as shown in Figure 1 below. We do not have local or national recidivism rates to compare to because our court does not track overall recidivism rates for youth. These data are not tracked by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention on a national basis either. The Ottawa County Family Court finds our recidivism rates to be significant and consistently supports our efforts for funding and program expansion.

Figure 1: Mentee Delinquent Behavior



Communication to Stakeholders

Program evaluation is shared with program participants, parents, mentors, partners and other stakeholders in a variety of ways. A one page, double sided document is created to share highlights of statistics and participant comments. This document is sent to all stakeholders. A complete version of the evaluation is a lengthy document of approximately 20 pages. Full copies of the evaluation are provided to county commissioners, court administrators, state Extension administration and are available upon request to any other interested party. Additionally, these documents are provided to mentoring staff around the state through trainings on mentor program evaluation and perspective volunteers and parents of youth. Program highlights can also be accessed on the Ottawa County MSUE portal at: www.msue.msu.edu/ottawa

Evidence of Sustainability

Journey 4-H Youth Mentoring began in 1992. The program was originally staffed by one Extension Educator. Since 2004, the program has added two Program Assistants and one AmeriCorps member to assist in serving more youth. The county continues to provide funding support for all of these positions. The staff salaries are now an on-going part of the county Extension budget. Volunteers partner with staff to raise funds for additional program activities. Volunteers, community members and businesses also make donations to support programming efforts.

Replicability

In 2006, Muskegon County MSUE and Wayne County MSUE developed and implemented youth mentoring programs based on the Journey 4-H Youth Mentoring model. In addition, this program provided resources to new 4-H mentoring initiatives in 26 other counties. In 2006, Journey 4-H Youth Mentoring staff members were contacted by the United States Department of Education to share information regarding the program for a national youth mentoring tool kit. The Journey 4-H Mentoring program is one of four programs highlighted in this document.

Additionally, this program served as a model for statewide training for mentoring staff and national service members in Extension and other community based youth mentoring programs. Journey 4-H Youth Mentoring staff members have provided workshops and training sessions in Michigan and at national conferences. Extension professionals served in leadership roles in the development of the Michigan Quality Program Standards for Youth Mentoring in partnership with Mentor Michigan. This document serves as a guide for mentoring professionals throughout the state to assist them in designing and implementing programs.

Rationale and Importance of Program

Journey 4-H Youth Mentoring has impacted 4-H programming throughout Michigan in a variety of ways. Incorporating planned mentoring as a delivery vehicle for 4-H has allowed us to reach out to youth who were not being served by other 4-H programming efforts or did not see 4-H as a program that met their needs. This effort has also provided Michigan 4-H with the opportunity to engage volunteers who did not consider 4-H as an organization that met their needs or interests. As a result of programs like the Journey 4-H Youth Mentoring Program, we are now able to reach an entirely new population of volunteers who are committed to helping youth and building support systems across communities that address local youth needs. This programming has brought new partnerships and collaborative opportunities with other youth serving organizations, funders and businesses locally and statewide. It has led to the development of new resources that benefit the entire 4-H organization, especially in the areas of volunteer development and management, program management and youth development education.

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